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ABSTRACT

Errors made by Finnish university students in the use of the English article were analyzed using two types of error analyses: a traditional type of error analysis to provide an overall view of the errors found in students' compositions; and a multiple-choice test devised on the basis of the findings and shortcomings of the first test. With the first test, the number of correct responses are unknown, but with the second test, the errors are compared with the correct uses of the article. For the first test, data were collected from literature examination answers provided by 90 students of English from all levels of study. The second test was given to 45 first-year students of English, and test items chiefly represented generic and unique references, as well as other frozen uses of the article. Errors are described in terms of: (1) the total number of errors classified according to linguistic categories, (2) hierarchy of difficulty based on relative frequencies in test two, (3) errors classified according to the strategies employed by students, and (4) hierarchy of difficulty based on the strategies employed by the students. Strategies included omission of "a" and "the," addition of "a" and "the," "a" instead of "the," and "the" instead of "a." Defects in the present teaching system and suggestions for improvement are offered based on the findings. (SW)

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ERRORS MADE BY FINNISH UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN THE USE OF THE ENGLISH ARTICLE SYSTEM

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It is a fact known to every Finnish teacher of English that Finnish learners make many article mistakes. It is also understood that these errors are mostly caused by the fact that no such independent grammatical category as the article exists in Finnish on which the learners could lean when learning the use of the English article system. This, of course, holds true generally, but we still come up against the problem of which parts of the English article system are especially difficult for Finnish learners to understand and learn.

HOW TO COMPARE THE ENGLISH ARTICLE AND FINNISH SPECIES

Daneš (1964:225) claims that much confusion could be avoided in the discussion of syntactic problems if the elements and rules of three different levels were distinguished. The three levels of syntax are: (1) the level of the semantic structure of the sentence, (2) the level of the grammatical structure of the sentence, and (3) the level of the organization of utterance. It is felt that this division is of vital importance, if we are to give a systematic description of the article and species, because it seems to provide a uniform frame of comparison. When the grammars of Finnish say that there is no article in Finnish, they mean that there is no such grammatical device as the article on the grammatical level of Finnish syntax. But since Finnish people can make perfectly clear references to various things when talking to each other, some way must exist of expressing the main function of the English article:

> "The definite article indicates that the speaker and the hearer are familiar with the referent that is being talked about. The definite article is said to denote that the speaker assumes that the hearer is not able to identify the referent" (Ihalainen 1974:3).

It is therefore inevitable that species should be studied as a means

of the level of the organization of utterance, nowadays commonly called the Functional Sentence Perspective (FSP).

According to Quirk et al. (1972: 147-165), the three basic functions of the article are to express: (a) specific reference, (b) generic reference, and (c) unique reference. Specific reference deals with the most important aspect of the article, since it includes the functions of the articles as a discourse referent. Generic reference is used to denote what is normal or typical for members of a class (Quirk et al. 1972: 147-150). Szwedek (1975: 34) sees genericness as a mood and says that while specific reference goes beyond the boundaries of the sentence, genericness is not a property of articles, nouns or verbs but of sentences. Names possess unique reference. Quirk et al. (1972: 160) maintain that names have unique reference, because they do not share the characteristics of common nouns, lacking article contrast in particular. The difference between common and proper nouns is that the unique reference of names has been institutionalized. This is how the most up-to-date grammars of English describe the English article system. We must remember that grammarians usually deal with individual sentences, but, as said above, specific reference goes beyond the boundaries of the sentence. It is thus obvious that specific reference should be studied as a means of FSP in which utterances longer than sentences are taken into account in investigation. Generic sentences, on the other hand, can well be studied on the grammatical level of syntax, because genericness is a property of a certain individual, contextually individual, sentence type.

Unique reference requires the shortest scope of investigation, because it can be easily studied as a part of proper name formation.

Specific reference. - According to the principles of FSP new information is introduced to the reader in sentence-final position both in English and Finnish. Any fairy-tale is a pure example of this system.

(1) Once upon a time ther was *a* beautifull princess. *The* princess lived in *a* big castle. *The* princess had a very wicked brother, who owned *the* castle...

New information is thus marked with an indefinite article and, when the information has been introduced to the reader, the given information is placed in sentence non-final position and marked with the definite article. Deviations from this basic distribution are also marked with the articles.

Finnish follows the same distribution.

(2) Olipa kerran kaunis prinsessa. Prinsessa asui suuressa linnassa. Prinsessalla oli hyvin ilkeä veli, joka omisti linnan...

Word order has an important role to play in Finnish. In Finnish, word order has no grammatical function as in English and its main function is thus to express coreferential relations. Since there is no article in Finnish, deviations from the basic distribution are expressed in a variety of ways. Finnish can use the following means at least to express deviations from the main rule: case endings, pronouns and numerals. Specific reference, or species, in Finnish is thus a network of certain syntactic, morphological and lexical devices.

Generic reference. - Generic sentences are individual, contextually independent. They are a way of making generalizations, a way of expressing general truths. The definite generic article refers to a whole class and the indefinite and zero articles refer to the individuals within a group. It seems that the Finnish way of making generalizations is different from the English one. In Finnish we use the singular to refer to individuals (*Hevonen on eläin.*) and the plural to refer to a whole class (*Hevoset ovat eläimiä.*). This use of article is thus liable to cause problems to Finnish learners of English.

RECOGNITION OF ERRORS

Testing methods. - The present analysis of article errors consists of two separate parts. First, a traditional type of error analysis (EA) is used to give an overall view of the errors found in students' compositions. Second, a multiple-choice test is devised on the basis of the findings and shortcomings of the first test. While in the first test we do not know the number of correct responses, the errors found in the second test are compared with the correct uses of the article.

According to Harris (1969: 14), scorer reliability centres on the stability or consistency with which test performances are evaluated. Scorer reliability tends to be low in the cases of free-response tests, like compositions, where a series of individual judgements must be made.

In this case the subjectivity of the analyst is due to the concept of "acceptability" which, according to Enkvist (1973: 100), is a concept relative not to a given grammar but to the opinion of the analyst. In

practice groups of informants can be far from unanimous when judging the acceptability of certain types of structures. Tran-Thi-Chau (1975: 122) shares this view:

> The identification of errors is essentially subjective. It is possible for two native speakers to differ, in a surprisingly large proportion of cases, as to whether they should be counted as errors. Consequently the degree of prescriptiveness of the individual analyst greatly affects the number of errors to be categorized.

On the basis of this discussion it seems that the scorer reliability of a free-response test cannot be very high. This is especially true of the first test in this study, since the present analyst is a non-native speaker of the English language.

Among the different types of test validity we are here interested only in content validity. If a test is designed to measure the mastery of a specific skill, we expect the test to be based upon a careful analysis of the skill, and we expect the items to represent adequately each portion of the analysis, not just those aspects which lend themselves most readily to a particular kind of test question (Harris 1969: 19). The learners themselves place limitations upon the data worked with by selecting, where possible, from their actual repertoire only those aspects of their knowledge in which, rightly or wrongly, they have most confidence (Corder 1973b: 39-40). It is thus evident that free-response tests cannot guarantee the fact that the test actually tests everything that was meant to be tested. That is why free-response tests cannot be used in error analyses that are meant to confirm or disprove the results of a contrastive analysis.

A traditional type of error analysis: Test 1. - The data for this test were collected from the literature examination answers written during the academic year 1973-4 at the University of Jyväskylä. Ninety students of English were selected from all levels of study using random sampling without replacement. There were 36 students from the approbatur level, 36 from the cum laude level and 18 students from the laudatur level. The notion 'level' is not in this case a precise concept since we do not know whether a 'cum laude' student has studied English at the university for two or, say, six years. Neither do we know whether the students were studying English as the main subject or as a subsidiary subject. This is one of the greatest disadvantages of all traditional error analyses: the fact remains

that the analyst knows very little about the informants. What we do know in this case is that the native language of the students was Finnish. We may further assume that they were about 18-30 years old and that all of them must have studied some other "article language" as well, at least at school.

The same amount of text from every student was analysed, counted in words. One hundred words were analysed from 90 students and thus a total of 9000 words fell within the scope of this analysis. The greatest disadvantage of this analysis is that we have only the errors and we cannot compare them with the number of correct responses. The error frequencies are bound, then, to be absolute rather than relative and, in consequence, the frequencies of different types of errors are not comparable with each other. Another disadvantage of this test is that the students had no motivation for being careful about the rules of English, because it is not the language that is judged in exams but the subject matter. In order to check the reliability of the analyst all ambiguous or uncertain items were also judged by a native speaker of English.

A sophisticated type of error analysis: Test 2. - On the basis of both the information collected from the free-response test and the theoretical principles behind the article system a multiple-choice test was devised, mainly to elicit information that did not come up in the first test. Consequently, the items chosen for this test chiefly represent generic and unique references, as well as other "frozen" uses of the article. Since the article with specific reference deals with utterances longer than sentences, this article use was tested by a small story in which the articles had been left out, and the students were asked to fill in the articles when necessary. The test was given during the last week of the autumn term in 1975 to 45 first-year students of English at the University of Jyväskylä. In order to raise the motivation of the students the test was administered by one of their own teachers and carried out during a normal lesson. The scorer reliability of this test is nearly perfect, since the correct responses were predetermined and, to avoid ambiguous items, the test itself was first tested by a native speaker of English.

As already stated, one of the greatest shortcomings of most early error analyses was that very little was known of the informants used in the analysis. Since the mother tongue cannot be the only interfering factor, background information is of vital knowledge for deeper analyses. Accordingly, after the students had finished the test they were given a questionnaire containing questions about their backgrounds. These answers were later classified and used as uncontrollable variables in explaining errors caused by interfering factors than the native language. The statistical method used here was the t-test.

DESCRIPTION OF ERRORS

The errors are first classified on the basis of linguistic categories in order to find out which parts of the article system are especially difficult for Finnish students. The absolute frequencies do not, however, offer a sound basis of comparison and, accordingly, the hierarchy of difficulty presented in Table 2 is formed on the basis of the so-called relative frequencies, i.e. the number of errors is compared with the number of correct choices. The hierarchy looks, however, somewhat different from what could be expected on the basis of the absolute frequencies presented in Table 1. This is, of course, due to the fact that the definite specific article seems to be more frequent in any text than the generic one, but otherwise the hierarchy is rather congruent with the predictions made on the basis of the comparison of the Finnish and English systems of reference. Thus we may conclude that free-response tests cannot be used to confirm or disprove the results of CA, as already stated in this study, because the students can avoid using the most difficult structures. The possibility of guessing could have been eliminated in Test 2 by adjusting the scores afterwards, but this was not done. The view was adopted that categories in which the error percentage is less than 10 % are not particularly difficult for Finnish students and such errors are in consequence sporadic rather than systematic. However, the 658 errors included in the hierarchy presented in Table 2 represent 91 % of the total of 724 errors in Test 2.

Table 1. The total number of errors classified according to linguistic categories

Name of Category	Test 1	Test 2
The indefinite article with specific reference	86	28
The definite article with specific reference	105	253
The zero article with specific reference	10	71
The indefinite article with generic reference	1	5
The definite article with generic reference	8	112
The zero article with generic reference	96	150
The definite article with unique reference	4	61
The zero article with unique reference	10	44
Miscellaneous mistakes	5	0
Total	325	724

While linguistic categories are useful in building up hierarchies of difficulty, it is the strategies employed by the students that can tell us something about the kind of knowledge on which the learner usually relies on when encountering a difficult problem. Whatever the criterion, it seems that the omission and addition of the definite article are the strategies most frequently employed by Finnish learners of English.

Table 2. Hierarchy of difficulty based on relative frequencies in Test 2

Order	Name of Category	Nr. of errors	
1.	The generic definite article before singular count nouns	77	57
2.	The definite article before plural count nouns with bounded generic reference	32	36
3.	The generic zero article before non-count nouns	110	35
4.	The "indicative" definite article before common nouns turned name	56	31
5.	The specific zero article before plural count nouns	14	31
6.	The specific zero article in intensive relation	25	28
7.	The specific zero article in prepositional phrases	31	23
8.	The specific definite article before nouns made partic. by the context	117	19
9.	The specific definite article before nouns made partic. by a modifier	125	17
10.	The zero article with unique reference	44	16
11.	The specific indefinite article before nouns with modification	22	12
12.	The definite article with unique reference having partitive meaning	5	11
		658	

When the error frequencies of the three levels of study are compared with each other we must remember that there were only 18 laudatur students in Test 1 and, accordingly, the error frequencies of the laudatur level must be multiplied by two to make them comparable with the errors of the other levels. After this adjustment is made it is obvious that there is no difference between cum laude level and laudatur students in the use of the article system.

Table 3. Errors classified according to the strategies employed by the students

Name of Strategy	Specific reference		Generic reference		Unique reference	
	Test 1	Test 2	Test 1	Test 2	Test 1	Test 2
Omission of *a*	71	26	1	2	0	0
Omission of *the*	97	172	8	83	4	56
Addition of *a*	1	53	8	7	0	0
Addition of *the*	9	45	88	117	10	44
A instead of *the*	8	82	0	29	0	3
The instead of *a*	15	2	0	3	0	0
Total	201	380	105	241	14	103

Table 4. Hierarchy of difficulty based on the strategies employed by the students

Name of Strategy	Test 1				Test 2	
	A	CL	L	All	Nr. of errors	%
Addition of *the*	51	30	26	107	206	20
Omission of *the*	52	42	15	109	311	15
Addition of *a*	4	5	0	9	60	12
A instead of *the*	3	3	2	8	114	11
Omission of *a*	40	24	8	72	28	7
The instead of *a*	5	6	4	15	5	1
Miscell. mistakes	2	1	2	5	0	0
Total	157	111	57	325	724	

EXPLANATION OF ERRORS - SPECIFIC REFERENCE

Omission of the indefinite article. - Most of the omissions of the indefinite article were unmistakably caused by interlingual interference from the mother tongue, since nearly all of the head nouns were in the position reserved for the introduction of new information both in English and Finnish. Thus a Finn understands a noun in sentence-final position to be indefinite by the position alone, unless marked otherwise by the operation of the context or by other means of solving ambiguity. Consequently, the information conveyed by the specific indefinite article appears redundant and, accordingly, the article is easily dropped when the attention of the learner is attracted by another factor. This theory is confirmed by the fact that the indefinite article was frequently omitted in the free-response test in which the attention of the students was focused upon the subject matter itself, whereas in Test 2 the students paid attention only to the correct use of the articles, then finding the indefinite article no real problem. Consequently, the errors in the first test represent the type Selinker (1972: 215) describes as follows:

> "It is important to note that fossilizable structures tend to remain as potential performance re-emerging in the productive performance of an IL (interlanguage) even when seemingly eradicated. Many of these pehnomena reappear in IL performance when the learner's attention is focused upon new and intellectual subject matter or when he is in a state of anxiety or other excitement."

The indefinite article was often omitted in positions where the head noun was modified by a modification structure. It appeared that the indefinite article was "forgotten" when the head noun was premodified by adjectives. A typical case of this type of error is the following sentence:

(3) It was *very skilfully made plan.* (a very skilfully made plan)

This strategy thus confirms the theory of first-language interference: when the learner's attention is focused upon something else, the fossilizable items start re-emerging in the learner's interlanguage (Selinker 1972: 215).

Selection of the instead of a. - Selection of the definite article instead of the indefinite was not a common strategy and, when it was employed, the reason was usually interlingual or, especially in Test 1, intralingual interference. Many of the intralingual errors in Test 1 were covert, i.e. they were not grammatical errors but rather inappropriate in their contexts.

(4) He will be *the second-class citizen*. (a second-class citizen)

Superlative forms are normally preceded by the definite article and, in consequence, the definite article was chosen as a result of over-generalization even if there was no comparison involved. In the same way the definite article was selected when the head noun was post-modified by the of-construction.

(5) Jane Austen presents *the vision of a world* where comedy reigns unchallenged. (a vision of a world)

It seems that most of the wrong selections of the definite article instead of the indefinite in Test 1 were of intralingual origin, whereas in Test 2 the frequency of such errors was very low and interlingual interference was more prominent. The role of first-language interference was supported by the fact that the Finnish grade in both the matriculation exam (ME) and the senior secondary school diploma was the only sociolinguistic variable which enabled some discrimination to be made among the students. To sum up, the specific indefinite article is not a serious problem to Finnish university students of English and the result is thus congruent with the predictions made on the basis of the similarities in FSP. It is only when the Finnish learner's attention is focused upon matters other than the rules of English that he starts dropping the indefinite articles. We must, therefore, draw the conclusion that Finnish university students have in this particular use of the English article system reached the post-systematic stage of errors introduced by Corder (1973a: 271).

Omission of the definite article. - There was a great number of errors in the use of the definite article in both tests. In fact, omission of the definite article was the most frequent strategy in both tests as regards the absolute frequencies in the tests. The most likely explanation for errors of this type is interlingual interference from the mother tongue. The article in English is always an obligatory choice while in Finnish its equivalents are often optional, word order being usually the only means of denoting contextual dependence. The theory of interference is supported by the great number of omissions of the definite article. Difficulty is due to the different means of denoting deviations from the

basic distribution of communicative dynamism (CD)[1] as well as to 'forgetting' the article when the distribution of CD is identical in both languages and, accordingly, the information conveyed by the article appears redundant. In the same way the context is a sufficient means of denoting contextual dependence for Finnish students and the article is again 'forgotten'.

(6) Now he has Jim, *river*, and the stars and he is quite satisfied. (the river)

Some of the omissions of the definite article were definitely so-called "redundant" errors caused by faulty materials, faulty teaching and faulty learning (Corder 1973a: 283). This was clearly the case with the word *people* in the following sentences.

(7) *People* in the corner seats pull up the windows and hold them shut by the window-strap. (the people)

(8) ..., and *people* who were holding the straps let them go. (the people)

One of the elementary stages of learning to use the definite article is to use it before a noun which has become definite as a result of being mentioned a second time in the same text. In sentence (7) the article was omitted by 69 % of the students in Test 2, which shows that to Finnish learners a modification structure is not a sufficient means of denoting contextual dependence. The surprising thing was that when the word *people* was mentioned again in the same context 36 % of the informants still deleted the definite article. This surprisingly high number of omissions must be due to the fact that the word *people* is generally taught to mean 'ihmiset' without the article and 'kansa' with the definite article. The definite article was not a source of difficulty with superlatives, with the pronoun *same* or with other 'frozen' uses. These errors were just 'slips of the pen' but, on the other hand, the frozen uses do not require any profound understanding of the article system, since one can easily learn the most frequent ones by heart. Consequently, the correct uses of the 'frozen' definite articles only represent 'language-like behaviour' (Corder 1967: 168).

[1] By CD we understand the extent to which a sentence element contributes to the development of communication.

Selection of a instead of the. - Interlingual interference from the native language is clearly the primary cause of most of the wrong selections of the indefinite article instead of the definite.

(9) The people in the corner seats pull up the windows and hold them shut by *a window-strap*. (the window-strap)

In example (9) 62 % of the informants of Test 2 chose the indefinite article instead of the definite. This is a typical example of first-language interference, because the noun in question occupies the position normally reserved for the introduction of new information in both languages. The definite article must, however, be used to express the contextual dependence of the noun, i.e. the strap is a part of the window. In this case then, the operation of the context works counter to the basic distribution of CD. Especially difficult for Finnish learners are cases where a noun is made particular by a modification structure. The difficulty is increased when the noun is in the position reserved for new information.

(10) The railway carriage is dark except for *a feeble glimmer* of the small lamps in the ceiling. (the feeble glimmer)

In sentence (10) 71 % of the informants interpreted the noun as representing indefinite specific reference. With adjusted scores the result sinks, in fact, below the guessing level. A modification structure was not, then, a sufficient means of denoting contextual dependence according to the informants.

The zero article. - From the theoretical point of view additional types of errors cannot be caused by first-language interference, since there is no article in Finnish on the grammatical level of syntax. It is evident that the zero article with specific reference must be analysed on the grammatical level rather than as a means of FSP, since it typically involves certain idiomatic and, in a sense, frozen structures with a generic meaning. They must, therefore, be treated as special cases of specific reference. As these phrases are regarded as exceptional they are taught and learned as exceptions case by case and the only 'rule' of the students has been to learn them by heart. This is why it is easy to elicit errors of this type: one only has to choose phrases that are

less common in everyday use. With regard to the theoretical background of the zero article with specific reference it is not surprising that intralingual interference or overgeneralization seemed to be the dominant strategy employed by the students in Test 2. As the basic rule is that singular count nouns must take an article, Finnish learners dare not leave out the article.

(11) He *turned a communist* in order to help the poor. (turned communist)

Consequently, 31 % of the students added the indefinite article in Test 2 even though the zero article is to be used with intensive relation. A modification structure was another source of errors with intralingual origin. This becomes obvious in sentence (12).

(12) The darkness outside the windows is touched by *the puffs of cloudy whiteness*. (by puffs of cloudy whiteness)

The number of redundant errors is difficult to count, but it is not impossible that some of the unnecessary additions of the definite or indefinite article were caused by faulty teaching or by 'too much teaching of the wrong kind'. One thing is at least clear: this part of the English article system is taught unsystematically at Finnish schools.

EXPLANATION OF ERRORS - GENERIC REFERENCE

The indefinite article. - Jespersen (1949 VII:424) suggests that

> "it would be best to reserve the term *generic* for the use with the definite and zero articles. With *a* the sb (substantive) refers to all members (or any member) of the class or species it denotes, but only as a representative of the members. It does not denote the class or species in itself. I propose the term *all-representative use*. The meaning of *a* here approaches that of *any*."

Because the all-representative indefinite article can be interpreted easily in Finnish as *mikä* or *kuka tahansa* it is not surprising that there were only a few mistakes in this part of the article system. The task is made even more uncomplicated by the fact that in a free-response test the writer can freely choose whether he wants to make reference to a whole class or to the individuals within the class. But since there were only a few errors in Test 2 as well we must draw the conclusion that the all-representative indefinite article is not a source of errors to Finnish university students.

The definite article. - It is a matter of controversy whether the errors in the use of the generic definite article are classified as interlingual or redundant errors. From the theoretical point of view this error type is naturally of interlingual origin, because the Finnish language does not possess any equivalent of the 'toto-generic' definite article. From the learning point of view it is perhaps better to say that a noun with collective reference takes the noun alone or the zero article in Finnish.

(13) Haukka on suurempi kuin varpunen.
/hawk is bigger than sparrow/

If we want to make reference to the individuals within the class, the pronoun *mikä tahansa* must be added before the noun. Since the difference between the specific and generic references is a semantic matter and requires no formal means of expression in Finnish it is natural that Finnish learners are confused when faced with a noun having toto-generic reference. According to the hierarchy of difficulty introduced by Stockwell et al. (1965: 284), a category that is lacking in the native language is a source of maximal difficulty. The results of this study seem to support this theory: the generic definite article before singular count nouns turned out to be the most difficult part of the English article system as presented in the hierarchy of difficulty based on the multiple-choice test (Table 2).

(14) A/- *tiger* and a/- *cat* belong to the same family of animals. (the tiger...the cat)

As regards this particular example (14), as many as 62 % of the students selected either the zero (38 %) or the indefinite (24 %) article instead of the correct one (38 %). Since we do not know whether the definite article was chosen deliberately or by chance, we are bound to draw the conclusion that Finnish first-year university students have no idea of the usage of the generic definite article in English and that they are, therefore, greatly influenced by the native language.

It was mentioned above that some of these errors are redundant, but it is better to say that the impact of the mother tongue is rein-

forced by faulty teaching and faulty materials. This is due to the fact that the specific and generic references are not separated in the grammars used in Finland but are simply individual items in long lists of different uses of the definite article. This is the method commonly used by all grammars based on the traditional linguistic model: the different functions of items are of no relevance. From the learning point of view it is of vital importance to separate the specific and generic functions of the definite article from each other.

According to Miettinen (1974 : 22-24), the indefinite article is used to denote that the noun refers to something which has been used as a representative of its class, e.g. *A rat is larger than a mouse*. The definite article is used when a singular common noun refers to a whole class or group, e.g. *The rat is larger than the mouse*. Consequently, the indefinite and definite articles are presented as synonyms by using the same example in both cases and learners are obliged to draw the conclusion that there is no difference in their meanings.

The definite article with adjectives as head was not a source of difficulty in either of the tests. It seems, again, that such uses of the article which are in a sense frozen and exceptional can be memorized easily without any actual understanding.

The zero article: addition of a. - Additional types of errors are not, in principle, caused by first-language interference, since there is no generic article in Finnish. The addition of the indefinite article was not a common strategy with nouns having generic reference (Table 3) and when it was employed the usual reason was that the head noun was misinterpreted to be a count noun. This strategy was then analogous to the omission of the indefinite article with specific reference: a count noun in English may be an uncountable noun in Finnish and vice versa. Additional confusion is caused by the fact that many English nouns can be both countable and uncountable, with a semantic distinction involved in the choice of the article. Consequently, unnecessary additions of the indefinite article seem to be due to both intralingual and interlingual interference.

The zero article: addition of the. Whatever criterion we use, the addition of the definite article before abstract nouns having generic

reference was a strategy too frequently employed in both tests. There are several explanations for this error type.

Even though the Finnish language possesses no article on the grammatical level of syntax, it may have an indirect impact upon the strategies employed by Finnish learners of English. Seppänen (1974: 414) states that the 'toto-generic' definite article in fact represents the definite generic form and only the 'parti-generic' form may be regarded as indefinite. It is therefore perfectly understandable that the students had a strong tendency to add the definite article before abstract nouns having 'toto-generic' reference.

(15) From this time comes also his love towards *the water* as a symbol of happiness. (water)

It seems that reality is divided up in different ways in different cultures. The English appear to be of the opinion that different concepts expressed by abstract nouns are still independent units when they are premodified by one or more adjectives. Such nouns are further marked by the zero article and have generic reference, and the adjectives are considered as descriptive rather than limiting. Since Swedish students often add the definite article unnecessarily before uncountable nouns (Stenström 1975: 24), it seems that Finnish and Swedish learners make a similar division of adjectives into descriptive and limiting ones. It is true that the Finns and the Swedes are very similar people both culturally and as regards their way of thinking: what is a qualifying adjective to an Englishman is a restrictive one to a Finn or a Swede. The result was a great number of errors in sentence (16).

(16) I find *the contemporary Finnish design* very exciting. (contemporary Finnish design)

Quirk et al. (1972: 153) state that

> in comparison with some other European languages English tends to make a liberal interpretation of the concept generic in such cases, so that the zero article is used also where the reference of the noun head is restricted by premodification".

As already noted, Swedish does not make a liberal interpretation of genericness and the impact of the native language is accordingly reinforced by Swedish interference.

The same tendency of adding the definite article unnecessarily was

also evident in the use of the generic zero article with plural countable nouns. The errors were then clearly analogous with the errors made in the use of the zero article before uncountable nouns. As already noted, no errors occured in Test 2 when the head noun had no modifiers.

(17) Typewriters are useful machines.

But as soon as a noun was modified by some qualifying adjectives, the definite article reappeared.

(18) *The well-cut chrystal glasses* can be very beautiful. (well-cut chrystal glasses)

Even stronger was the impact of a postmodification structure, since 20 % of the students who took part in Test 2 added the definite article in sentence (19).

(19) *The dogs* with long legs run fast. (dogs)

According to Dommergues (1976: 113), the different interfering factors function together and not independently as separate variables. This seems to be true especially with this error type.

EXPLANATION OF ERRORS - UNIQUE REFERENCE

The definite article. - Errors in the use of the definite article with proper nouns were primarily and theoretically caused by intralingual interference, since the definiteness of English names is expressed inherently, whereas common nouns turned names take the "indicative" definite article and are thus, from the learning point of view, exceptions to the main rule. Because the functional and semantic load of the "indicative" definite article is very light, it is very liable to omission.

(20) The dinner will be held at *Grand Hotel.* (the Grand Hotel)

Since the definite article has only an indicative function with proper nouns (Seppänen 1974: 295), its omission cannot be regarded as a very serious error from the point of view of communication. It can have an irritating effect on native speakers of English, but it can only very rarely provide any real communication block between the speaker and the hearer in a real situation.

The zero article. - Errors in the use of the zero article were naturally wrong additions of the definite article. True names, i.e. names of countries,

persons, etc., did not appear to be a source of difficulty to these students when not preceded by any modification structures, but as soon as the head noun was modified by adjectives the definite article started to re-emerge.

(21) Henderson lived in *the dry Africa*. (dry Africa)

This error type was clearly analogous with the wrong additions of the definite article before uncountable nouns with generic reference discussed above. First-language interference can thus have an indirect influence on the strategies employed by Finnish learners.

Most of the wrong additions of the definite article are, however, of intralingual origin. Except for pure names it is difficult to remember which proper nouns take the definite article and which can accept the zero article only. Theoretically the distinction is clear enough, but from the learning point of view it usually requires mere recall in the present teaching system. Even if the material is logically meaningful, meaningful learning will not take place if the learner simply has to memorize it (Ausubel & Robinson 1969: 55).

CONCLUSION

On the basis of the results of this study, one is bound to draw the conclusion that there are certain defects in the present teaching system. Finnish teachers of English often say that the use of articles is very difficult to teach. It is, of course, difficult to teach something that one does not understand oneself. This has led to the fact that the use of articles is taught in a way that is very near the rote end of the meaningful-rote continuum and completed with mechanical practice.

As for the article with specific reference, the view adopted by the present analyst is that it should be taught by comparing the English and Finnish means of distributing communicative dynamism over sentence elements. Starting with simple texts like fairy tales the Finnish learner could be made to discover how English and Finnish introduce new information to a text and how the new information becomes given information. At the same time the learner could make observations on what changes take place on the grammatical level connected with the distribution of communicative dynamism and the use of articles.

Particular attention should be paid to the order and fashion of presentation. It seems more natural to start with specific reference, but the main thing is that specific and generic reference should be kept apart somehow at the beginning.

As regards the definite article with unique reference, the most meaningful way of teaching it seems to be in connection with the principles of proper noun formation in English as a whole. It should be pointed out that capital letters do not affect the use of the definite article with common nouns turned names. A good way of practising this might be letting the learners form various kinds of imaginative associations, organizations, unions, etc.

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